

**THE EXTENT OF
RURAL/ RESIDENTIAL
DEVELOPMENT ON CLASS 1 AND 2
LAND**

A CASE STUDY AT WESTMERE (2014)

(This report updates a study, of the same name,
completed in 1994)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Productive land is an important commodity in terms of sustaining an agricultural sector that is the backbone of the Wanganui economy. A national land capability classification system has been established which segregates land into classes of productive quality. This system uses eight main classes of which Class 1 comprise the highest quality land and Class 8 is the poorest land.

In 1994 Council undertook a study of land use with a view to quantifying the pressure for urban sprawl onto Class 1 and 2 land. This then enabled consideration of how best to manage any associated resource management issues through the District Plan.

In 2013, Council reviewed the District Plan provisions in relation to the rural environment. It was timely to review the trends associated with lifestyle block development in the District and consider how patterns may have altered since 1994.

1.1 Westmere Study Area

A large section of Class 1 and Class 2 land lies directly to the north of the Wanganui urban boundary, in the Westmere block. Westmere was identified as an area of urban hinterland most at risk of, and subject to, urban or peri urban development pressure. While this is not the only area comprising Class 1 and Class 2 land in the Wanganui District, it is the block that has had the most subdivision and consequent development.

As a result of this and the limits to resources, the original 1994 study focussed on the Westmere area. The study concluded that the loss of Class 1 and Class 2 land within the Westmere study area was insignificant. The study recorded that:

“What has emerged from these results, is that there is a demand for large residential sections in the rural environment. Further this demand appears to be located along a corridor where the character is slowly changing from rural production to a semi- rural settlement (neither rural [n]or urban). While the impact on the loss of productive soil is minimal (these sections represent only 0.6% of total class 1 & class 2 land in the Wanganui District) the wider implications are more serious. The trend is increasing, suggesting that a peak in this type of subdivision will not occur for some time.”¹

¹ The Extent of Rural/Residential Development on Class 1 and 2 Land, Planning Services ,WDC 1994, page 10

The study went on to consider potential resource management implications:

“The trend toward a residential corridor appearing in the rural area clearly identifies a gap in policy. The trend raises several serious questions:

- 1 Is this corridor an isolated occurrence or does it represent a signal that the urban boundary will expand into this region?*
- 2 What infrastructural costs are likely to be generated from the present subdivisions and the probable pressure for more?*
- 3 Does Council envisage an uncontrolled urban boundary, or does it wish to clearly define the urban and rural identity?*
- 4 The level of investment on the dwelling, and the degree of fragmentation of the land holdings would make it difficult to return to a land based productive use in the future. Is it desirable to foreclose future options now?*
- 5 The policy for managing rural subdivision is clearly not working and never envisaged this type of development. Should it be amended so that its original intent can be met? ²*

These questions were answered outside the original report and changes made to the regulation of subdivision in the District Plan Rural Zone. At the time it was assumed that other urban hinterland areas would be at less risk of urban sprawl than the Westmere area. Today the area of Westmere is still dominant, as a focus of smallholding development pressure relative to the other hinterland, although areas such as Mosston Road and Longbeach Drive have established in the interim period. For this reason it made sense to update the 1994 using the same study area boundaries.

In 2013 Council replicated the 1994 study. However stakeholder feedback identified inconsistencies between the site included in the in the 1994 and the 2013 reports. The validity of the findings in the 2013 report was questioned. As a result, a further report has been produced, which focuses more simply on quantifying the trends for subdivision of land for rural lifestyle living.

² The Extent of Rural/Residential Development on Class 1 and 2 Land, Planning Services ,WDC 1994, page 10



Figure 1 Westmere Study Area - Locality Map

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this current study is to establish what changes have occurred within the Westmere study area and the extent of subdivision 3 hectares (ha) or less since 1994.

This study will inform the development of the District Plan Rural Review. Improved understanding of development trends and pressures in this area will guide decisions about how best to protect Class 1 and 2 land for current and future generations. A review of the effectiveness and efficiency of existing regulation is well under way.

The need to protect high quality land for future generations was highlighted by the rural community during initial consultation for the District Plan Review.

Restrictions on subdivision and lot sizes within the Proposed Rural A Zone have been formally proposed, to protect the most versatile soils and to contain loss of the productive capacities of such land.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

A preliminary investigation was carried out to determine the extent of smallholdings. It is assumed that small holdings of less than 3 hectares are most likely to be used for a mix of residential and low-productive rural purposes. Once land is subdivided into smaller allotments it is rare for such land to ever be amalgamated or used for larger scale rural activities again.

An October 2014 map of the original study area identifying property boundaries has been compared to the 1994 map. It is noted that some areas within the 1994 study area had been excluded from original report. These areas include Kai Iwi Settlement and the area round Mannington Road and Dickens Lane. These areas were included in the 2013 report but have now been excluded from this report to ensure consistency with the 1994 report.

The original 1994 Westmere case study focused on the land use of each property at that time rather than the potential for future land uses. Properties three hectares or less were categorised according to size and land use.

This 2014 study is focused on fragmentation of land, identifying the trend of allotments 3 hectares or less rather than land use. Once land has been subdivided into small parcels the probability of that land being used for productive purposes is greatly reduced. This is not to say the productive capacity of the land is reduced, rather the likelihood it will be used to its full economic potential is affected.

2.1 Allotment comparison

Land parcels comprising 3 hectares or less in the 2014 Westmere study area were compared to land parcels shown in the 1994 report. Three categories of land comprising 3 ha or less have been identified;

- allotments created since 1994
- allotments that existed in 1994 and now held separately
- allotments unchanged since 1994.

Individual title searches have not been completed for any lots within the Westmere study area due to cost and resource restrictions. The listed owners of properties have been compared to identify separate properties.

A number of properties 3ha or less were excluded from the 1994 report. It is assumed these properties were probably owned with adjacent properties that together totalled more than 3 hectares.

This report has followed the same rule of thumb. If the property existed in 1994 and is owned with an adjacent where the total property area is greater than 3 hectares they have been excluded from the total.

Any new allotment created since 1994 is counted as a separate property as it is reasonable to assume the intention is they are to be sold separately.

2.2 Correction Total Area

After re-creating the 1994 study area map for Westmere, we identified an inconsistency between the total study area indicated in 1994 and the data for 2014.

The study areas were traced to ensure the boundaries were accurate and identical. It appears the 1994 report, contains an error where it stated that the total study area was 5,379.9ha. It has been confirmed that the total area of land within the study area is in fact 4,320 hectares. To enable a meaningful comparison between the two time periods the correct total area of 4,320 hectares has been used for both sets of data.

3.0 Subdivision Trends 1994 - 2014

3.1 Key Observations

Westmere Study Area	1994		2014		Change 1994 - 2014	
	Total No. of Properties		Total No. of Properties			
	399		575		176	
	No. of properties	% of total properties	No. of properties	% of total properties	No. new properties	Change (of total)
New allotments since 1994 (3ha or less)			185	32.2%		
Allotments separated since 1994 (3ha or less)			57	9.9%		
Total existed in 1994 (3ha or less)			135	23.5%		
Total allotments 3ha or less	135*	33.8%	377	65.6%	242	35.8%
Allotments greater than 3ha	264	66.2%	198	34.4%	-66	-25%
Total	399	100%	575	100%	176	44.1%

Table 1 Change in Number of Properties

***Note:** In the 1994 report 138 properties were identified as being of 3 ha or less site area. Our assessment in 2014 found there were actually 135 properties that were 3ha or less in 1994. We have chosen to use this figure.

3.2 Total allotments 3 hectares and less

This section narrows down the total hectare and percentages of what existed in 1994, what exists now and the change during that time.

Westmere Study Area	1994		2014		Change	
	Total Study Area		Total Study Area			
	4,320ha		4,320ha		4,320ha	
	By Area	% of Total Area	By Area	% of Total Area	Increase By Area	% of Change
Total Properties = < 1 ha	30.5ha	0.71%	72.2ha	1.67%	41.7ha	0.96%
Total Properties >1ha – 2ha	47.9ha	1.11%	220.9ha	5.11%	173ha	4%
Total Properties >2ha - 3ha	51.32ha	1.19%	122.32ha	2.83%	71ha	1.64%
Totals 3ha or less	129.72ha	3%	415.42ha	9.6%	285.7ha	6.6%
Balance Area	4190.28ha	97%	3904.58ha	90.4%		
Total	4,320ha	100%	4,320ha	100%		

Table 2 Change in Number of Site Area

3.3 Discussion

While there are arguments for and against the effect of lifestyle blocks on productivity, the key resource management issue is the potential permanent loss of the productive availability of Class 1 and Class 2 land.

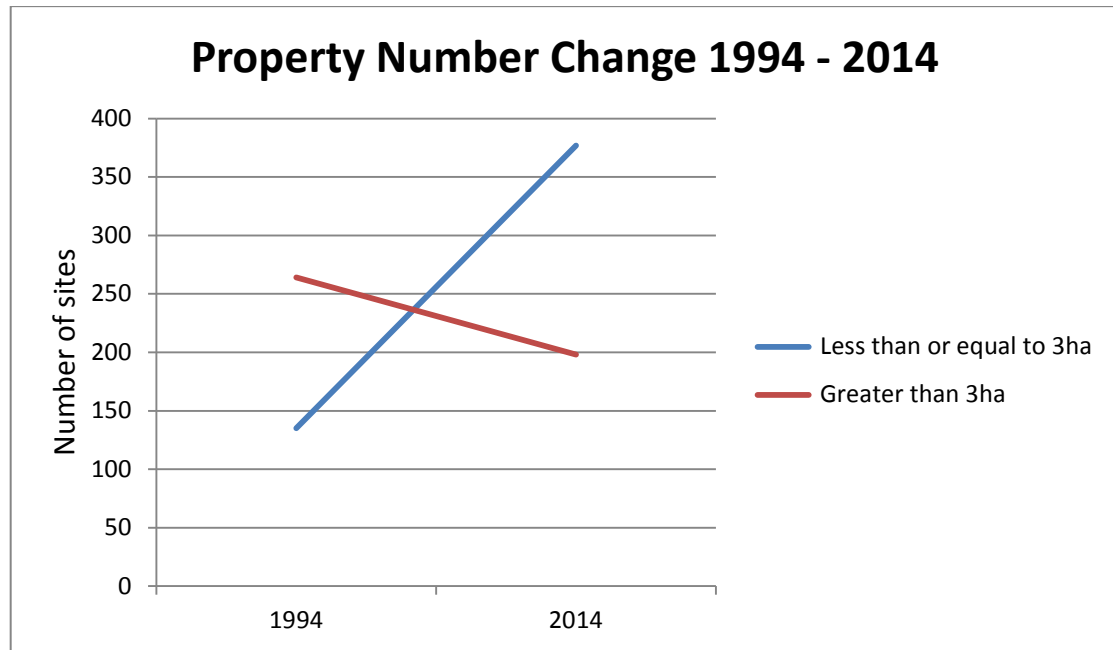
Councils Geographical Information Mapping Systems (GIS) identifies that in fact in 1994 only 135 properties existed. In 1994 rural lifestyle properties represented 1/3 of all properties. Twenty years on, lifestyle properties now represent 2/3 of all properties in the study area. An additional 242 properties in the area means a significant increase in people living in the area. Many if not most of these people will likely commute to urban areas for work. This trend together with 25% decrease in larger rural properties combines to potentially change the social and environmental proportions for residents in the study area. Typically this might translate to less tolerance to 'rural noise', demand for improved road and urban services. Potential restrictions on rural activities and creation of informational buffer areas on productive farm land. For example, not grazing cattle in paddocks near lifestyle block boundaries and not planting horticulture crops up to such boundaries as cant spray crops. Such informal buffer potentially further reduces land availability for productive use.

Out of the 242 allotments, 185 are new having been created through the subdivision process. An additional 57 allotments existed in 1994 however are now owned as separately allotments. These have been included as they are now used as individual entities rather than in conjunction with an adjoining allotment.

Table 1 identifies that 185 new properties have been created in the last 20 year in the study area. However 66 fewer properties of more than 3 ha now exist than in 1994.

Table 1 indicates an additional 242 properties 3ha or less site area have been created within the study area, an increase of 2/3 compared to almost two thirds of the total properties that existed in 1994. This equates to an average of 12 new properties being created each year of the intervening 20 year period.

The following graph highlights the increase in allotments 3ha or less and the decrease in allotments greater than 3ha. It is a concern that allotments that are greater than 3ha in size are being subdivided into multiple allotments 3 ha or less. The result is fewer allotments available for large scale rural activities.



Graph 1 Change in Property Numbers 3ha or less and greater than 3ha

Table 2 outlines the changes over the past 20 years and total area that has been reduced to allotments 3ha or less site area. In 1994 129.72ha of land comprising 3% of the total study area had been subdivided into allotments 3ha or less. In 2014 this total has risen to 415.42ha which equates to 9.6% of the same study area, an increase of 6.6% of the total land area.

The majority of subdivision has occurred in the 1-2ha site area range. This may be due to the minimum lot size permitted by the existing District Plan provisions being 1ha.

The map indicates a continuing trend of subdivision and consequential development on Class 1 land clustered to the North East of the study area.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

1. The trend towards lifestyle development in the Westmere area, observed in the years leading to the 1994 land use study, has continued through to 2014. Anecdotally the area continues to be attractive for residential and lifestyle development, which suggests that demand for this land use trend will continue over the next 10 years.
The character and rural ambience of the study area has evolved, with distinct areas now clearly identifiable as having a 'peri-urban or lifestyle block' ambience rather than one of a productive rural sector. The distinction between rural and peri-urban ambience varies throughout the study area. A clear pattern of dense small holdings follows State Highway 3 and side roads including Blueskin Road, Western Line and Simpson Road.
2. The total area of rural productive land used as residential or lifestyle blocks has steadily increased over the period to 2014. It now comprises 9.6% of the total study area compared to 3% in 1994.
3. This development is occurring on Wanganui's largest area of Class 1 land. Wanganui is in the unique position of having a good climate as well as blocks of Class 1 land Class 2 land. There is a national trend of increased lifestyle development reducing the availability of high class land. It is important the implications of this are given due weighting.

The continued trend is of concern as it is causing continued reduction of productive land which is significant in terms of economic and environmental sustainability within the District context.

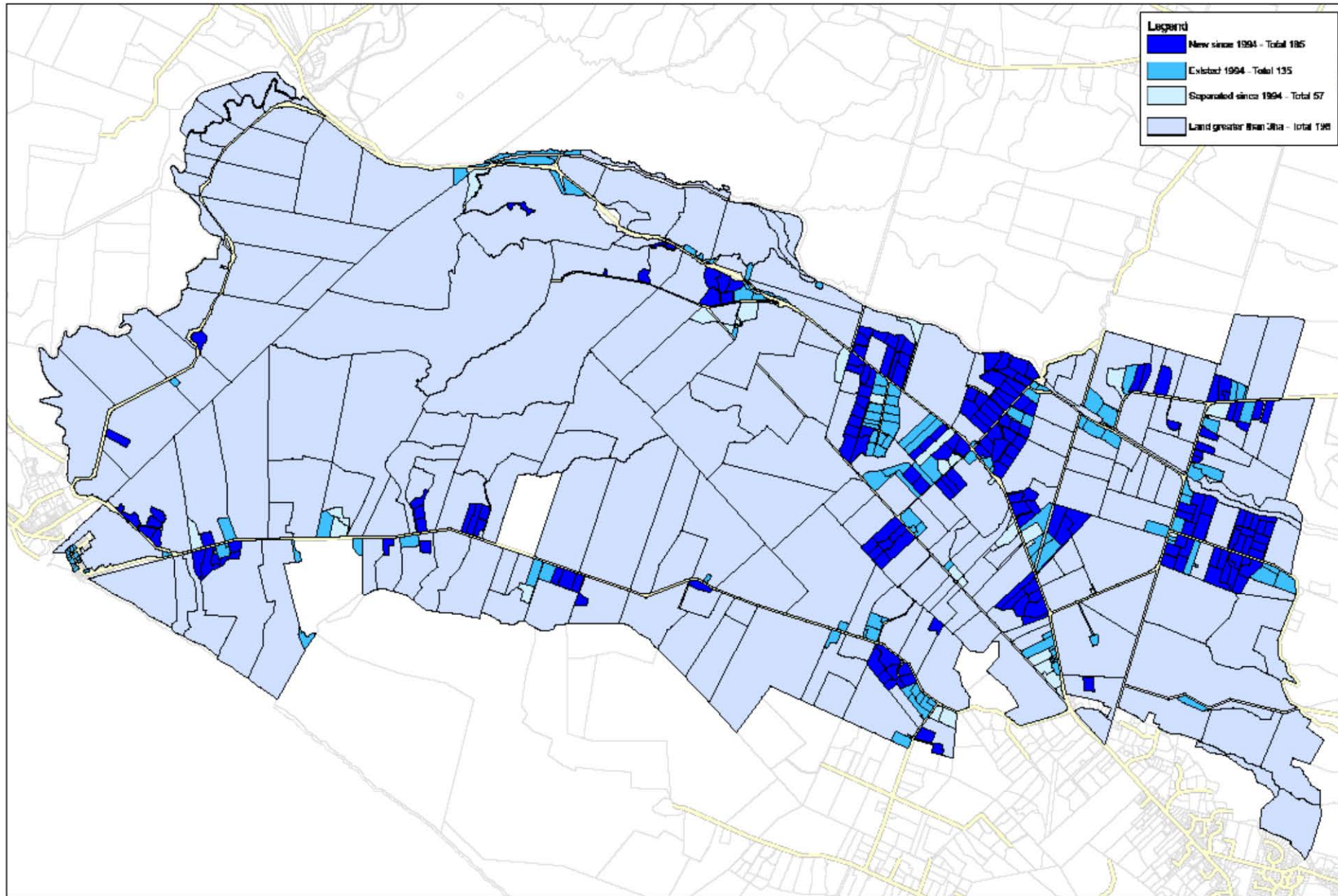
This report clearly identifies a trend of increased lifestyle development within the Westmere study area. The findings support the need to adopt methods to protect Class 1 and Class 2 Land within the Wanganui District. Without District Plan policies and regulations high class land within the District will continue to be lost.

Allowing subdivision to continue as it has over the last 20 years will continue to have flow on affects to neighbouring properties. This goes against national trends to

protect high quality land and does not give effect to the Horizons Regional Council One Plan.

The Plan Change 36 – Rural Zones proposal to increase minimum lot size for Rural A Zone land to 10ha has been relatively well supported by representatives of the rural community, as it is recognised that status quo of 1ha is simply not sustainable. This supports the rationale behind the proposed Plan Change.

2014 Map



1994 Map

